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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 TEL AVIV 001326

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

NEA FOR BURNS/SATTERFIELD
NEA/SA/EX FOR AUSTIN-FERGUSON; DEPT FOR DS/IP/NEA;
DEPT FOR DS/IP/ITA; DRL FOR A/S CRANER;
NSC FOR ABRAMS/DANIN;
USAID FOR DCHA, DCHA/FPP

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: KWBG PTER ASEC PHUM CASC KPAL IS GZ

SUBJECT: THE SITUATION ON THE GROUND: MARCH 3, 2004 (1400 HOURS LOCAL) -- IAF KILLS THREE HAMAS MILITANTS NEAR NETZARIM; ONE PALESTINIAN KILLED IN TULKAREM SHOOTOUT

THIS IS A JOINT MESSAGE FROM EMBASSY TEL AVIV AND CONGEN JERUSALEM.

11. (SBU) Summary: The IDF killed three Hamas militants March 3 near Netzirim after the three had reportedly fired two mortars at Netzirim settlement. Two missiles, believed to have been fired from an F-16, destroyed the militants' vehicle and killed the occupants as they tried to leave the area. Two bystanders were also wounded. In the West Bank, the IDF shot and killed one Palestinian in Tulkarem during an exchange of fire with Palestinian gunmen. The IDF later raided a hospital and arrested militants who were wounded in the shootout. A Palestinian protester who was seriously injured February 26 when the IDF used lethal force to disperse anti-fence demonstrators in Biddu died March 2. End Summary.

West Bank

12. (SBU) ATTACKS:

-- Death: The IDF March 3 shot and killed one Palestinian in Tulkarem during an exchange of fire with gunmen. The dead man was identified by Palestinian sources as Qays Aref Ofeh, said to be a member of al-Aqsa Martyrs, Brigades. The IDF later raided a hospital to arrest militants who had been wounded in the shootout.

-- Death: A Palestinian protester who was seriously injured February 26 when the IDF used lethal force to disperse anti-fence demonstrators in Biddu died March 2.

13. (SBU) ARRESTS:

-- The IDF March 2 arrested 16 Palestinians at locations throughout the West Bank.

Gaza Strip

14. (SBU) ATTACKS:

-- Deaths/Injuries: The IDF killed three Hamas militants March 3 near Netzirim after the three had reportedly fired two mortars at Netzirim settlement. Two missiles, believed to have been fired from an F-16, destroyed the militants' vehicle and killed the occupants as they tried to leave the area. Two bystanders were also wounded.

-- Mortars/Rockets: The IDF reported that one mortar was fired near Khan Yunis March 2, and the IDF fired tank shells at a Palestinian-owned building north of Rafah March 3.

-- Shootings: The IDF reported a total of four shootings March 2-3: three near Khan Yunis, and one near Netzirim.

-- Shootings: UNRWA reported that several houses were damaged in during clashes near Gaddi settlement when the IDF returned fire at the Austrian Housing Project in Khan Yunis.

-- Explosions: An explosive device was found and safely detonated south of Rafah March 3, according to the IDF.

15. (SBU) BORDER CROSSINGS/CHECKPOINTS

-- Route Four (Salahadeen Road), the main north-south traffic artery, was open for Palestinians March 3.

-- Erez Crossing was open March 3, and 8,850 Palestinian laborers crossed into Israel. All workers must be married and over age 35. The Erez Industrial Zone was also open, with 3,024 workers entering the Zone.

-- Sufa Crossing was open for Palestinian workers March 3, but the number of workers who crossed was unavailable. Sufa was also open March 3 for the import into Gaza of aggregates used in construction.

-- Karni Terminal was open March 3 for the import and export of goods into the Gaza Strip.

-- Rafah Terminal was open for Palestinian travelers March 3.

-- Tel al-Sultan checkpoint was closed March 3. Toufah checkpoint was open for residents of al-Mowassi.

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KURTZER